

Talking Points  
National Guard Announcement  
Thursday, February 1, 2007

It's always a pleasure to be back here in Meridian and Lauderdale County.

I want you to know the fact that I've been here twice in the last seven days has nothing to do with, well, you know, some other announcement that people seem to expect from me before too long. I'll deal with that when the time comes.

Today, I'm here with General Harold Cross – who serves as Mississippi's Adjutant General – and we have the kind of duty we love to do, because it's good news ... great news really for America, for Mississippi, for Meridian and the surrounding area.

Specifically it's good news for the men and woman of the 186<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing ... people you know as friends and neighbors, moms and dads, brothers and sisters. And people you know as soldiers who have answered their country's call in the highest degree of competence and professionalism in some of the world's most dangerous assignments.

General, I'm proud of you and all of the personnel in the 186<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing.

Marsha and I join every Mississippian in saying, very simply, "Thank you for your courage and sacrifices."

You know, since the inception of this Air Guard unit in 1939, the people of Meridian, Lauderdale County and the surrounding areas have demonstrated a strong, patriotic commitment and taken great pride in the unit's major contributions to national defense.

That support has been especially evident during the last three base realignment and closure cycles and very helpful as Mississippi made a strong case for new missions here at the 186<sup>th</sup>. Much of the effort has been led by Lamar McDonald and the Mississippi Military Communities Council, and I am grateful for their leadership and guidance.

The last round of base closures and realignments in 2005 affected Mississippi more than any of the previous rounds. Frankly, we took something of a hit, in Pascagoula and here in Meridian. That just made us more determined than ever to replace what has been lost.

We've worked closely with Senators Lott and Cochran, Congressman Pickering, and the entire Mississippi Congressional Delegation. General Blum, who heads National Guard Bureau at the Pentagon, has been very helpful.

The BRAC decision set off a surge of creative thinking underpinned by the fact that the history of this outstanding unit is too deep and too strong to be ignored. You have worked too hard. You have distinguished yourselves as among the nation's best. And, the stakes for the country are too high to lose the kind of commitment you bring to our military forces.

As for today's announcement, like the Key Brothers, who were among the founders of this unit, we just worked around the obstacles and found ways to get the job done.

I understand that missions change, that the needs of the U.S. military change. Change is a fact of life.

Under the announcement I'll now call on General Cross to make, some things will change here, too. But you'll see how the changes are constructive and will keep this unit active and engaged in performing very important new missions.

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(General Cross makes announcement.)

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(Q & A)